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Iran-Iraq: [The danger of an immediate confrontation on the Shatt al-Arab River apparently has been averted, but the basic dispute over the river border is unresolved.]

[The Iraqi Government reportedly has notified the Iranians that the "test" ship scheduled to sail down the river flying the Iranian flag will be allowed to pass without challenge. Last week the Iraqis had threatened to inspect Iranian ships in the river and to remove any Iranian military personnel found aboard. This threat produced a public declaration by Iran on 19 April that force would be met with force and further Iranian military preparations along the river.]

[Iran appears to have won, at least temporarily, the right to sail its ships flying the Iranian flag on the Shatt al-Arab, but the real Iranian goal may be to force renegotiation of the 1937 treaty which placed most of the boundary along the Iranian side of the river. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Afshar has declared the treaty invalid, because Iraq was under a "colonialist yoke" when the treaty was signed, and because Iraq has ignored certain provisions of the treaty. He announced that Iran now considers the median line of the river as the border between the two countries.]

[The Shatt al-Arab boundary has been a bone of contention for nearly 20 years and will not be easily resolved. The most recent attempt to renegotiate the issue--in February--ended in total failure. The Iranians may be trying to press the issue now with a massive display of force, hoping that the Iraqis, with their commitments in Kurdistan and Jordan, are in a weakened position.]

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